IT'S OUR BUSINESS

Alcohol, drugs and gambling in the workplace

The Addicted Employee: After Treatment

As a Returning Employee: Are you anxious about returning to work now that you have finished your treatment program for a substance abuse or gambling problem? Are you worried that you will be treated differently by your supervisor and co-workers?

As a Supervisor: Can you trust an employee whose performance was suffering before treatment? How do you know if the treatment has been successful? How will you handle it if the employee relapses? Does your organization do enough to help employees after the treatment program ends?

As a Co-worker: Do you know the best way to support a co-worker who is returning to work after getting help for a problem with alcohol, other drugs or gambling? Should you still invite them to your usual get-togethers after work?

If you wonder about these things, you are not alone. Many people on the job have worries when an employee returns to work after treatment for an alcohol, other drug or gambling problem.

Addiction treatment may be a series of sessions with a counsellor, or it may be attending a program on a daily basis for several weeks. Recovery is an ongoing process that continues long after counselling or the treatment program is complete. There are many ways a workplace can support an employee during this time, ensuring greater success.

Read on to learn more about

- steps the returning worker can take to ensure success
- organizational initiatives to support returning workers
- specific steps to assist recovering employees
- what co-workers can do to offer support and encouragement

Employees returning to work after an extended absence following any health or personal problem often have special needs. Here we are talking about recovery from an addiction, but many of these principles apply to the recovering employee in general.

WHAT THE RETURNING EMPLOYEE CAN DO

After attending addictions counselling or spending several weeks in a treatment centre, life can feel pretty good. In fact, you may even feel like you've got the problem under control and aren't at risk for relapse. Remember what you learned in treatment—the hard work starts when you start living your life clean and sober or gambling-free. Rely on your aftercare plan and use it as a guide in setting up your long-term supports.

Talk with your Human Resources (HR) department or your supervisor about any time off you will need for counselling appointments or follow-up programs. Talk about any fears you are experiencing about returning to work. Make sure you understand what is expected of you and any requirements the organization has about long-term support.

Plan what you will tell your co-workers about your absence so that you are not caught unaware when they ask—they will! Remember, they care about you and want to help. Tell them what is useful or helpful to you and what is not.

Rely on your Workplace Peer Support Team if you have one and follow through with the actions you've listed on your aftercare plan.

Tips for the Returning Employee

- Decide in advance what to tell co-workers about your absence.
- Talk with HR and/or your supervisor about any concerns you have about your return to work and develop solutions.
- Follow through with your aftercare plan.
- Attend aftercare counselling or programming.
- Attend support groups.
- Connect with your workplace peer support team.

Educating employees about alcohol, other drug and gambling problems may be the easiest step workplace leaders can take in supporting recovering employees.

WHAT THE WORKPLACE CAN DO

Policies and programs

It is very important for workplaces to develop clear policies that encourage early intervention with troubled employees. Some organizations will achieve this by developing an alcohol and drug policy, others will call it a "fitness-for-work" policy. Either way, the policy will outline ways for employees to get help and steps to support them through treatment and long-term recovery. Some policies also outline whether or not alcohol may be served at company functions. If alcohol is served, the policies make provision for safe and responsible use as well as taking the needs of non-drinking and recovering employees into account.

Larger workplaces may also have employee and family assistance programs (EFAP) to assist employees experiencing personal problems that may or may not be affecting their work performance. Small companies may not have an EFAP but they can still assist employees by maintaining a current listing of local resources available in the community.

Education

Studies indicate that employees returning from treatment find it difficult when their supervisors and co-workers are not knowledgeable about addiction. The process of an employee returning to work is much smoother and more successful when all staff are knowledgeable about addiction and recovery.

Education may be the easiest step a workplace can take in supporting recovering employees. Co-workers who are knowledgeable about alcohol, other drug and gambling problems will understand that, for the addict, total abstinence becomes a lifelong goal. They will also understand that recovery is a process that requires ongoing efforts to maintain change. That is why people who have chosen to quit forever are called "recovering."

Education about relapse is also important. Many people recovering from alcohol, other drug and gambling problems will relapse at least once. A relapse is not necessarily a sign of failure. A relapse can offer the person an opportunity to fine-tune a part of their ongoing recovery program that is not working well.

Workplace peer support teams

Many workplaces recognize the value of peers helping peers and set up peer support teams. When people have personal problems, they often talk to their friends first. Co-workers can be very helpful in encouraging employees with personal problems to seek help. This is especially true if they have been trained and are familiar with the kinds of supports and resources available to help. Peer support team members also know the difference between offering support and encouragement and the need for professional help.

Peer support teams can be an excellent support for recovering employees. Team members may have experienced personal problems themselves and can offer an understanding ear as well as their personal recovery successes. Most importantly, peer support team members are available on site, offering a ready source of confidential help and encouragement

Workpace support groups

Larger workplaces will sometimes host 12-step support group meetings on site. 12-step support groups are independent, worldwide fellowships of men and women who meet with the sole purpose of helping one another get or stay clean and sober or gambling-free. Some examples of 12-step groups are Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous. A workplace hosts these self-help group meetings by offering them a place in which to meet. The group runs itself.

Tips for the Workplace

- Develop and follow clear policies that encourage early recognition of troubled employees and that support them through treatment and long-term recovery.
- Offer services that assist troubled employees through an EAP program and/or identify resources available in your community.
- Develop education programs about alcohol, other drugs and gambling for all staff.
- Develop, train and participate in peer support teams.
- Make group support for recovering workers available at your worksite.
- Recognize the needs of recovering employees when planning social events.

WHAT WORKPLACE LEADERS CAN DO

Following are some specific steps that HR and/or the supervisor can take to ensure recovering employees a smooth transition back to work.

Return-to-work meetings

It can be very useful for the organization to have a meeting with the returning employee prior to the date the employee actually returns to work. Depending upon the size of the workplace, the employee may meet with a human resources professional, a health care provider, the supervisor or some combination of these individuals.

Often the recovering worker is wondering about confidentiality—who knows why I have been away and what have they been told? Sometimes they fear that others will treat them differently or avoid them altogether. They may even be unsure about the company's expectations about job performance or follow-up requirements.

Workplace leaders are often concerned about how to best support the returning worker. There may also be concerns about the worker's ability to maintain an acceptable level of job performance. A return-to-work meeting can offer both parties an opportunity to talk about their concerns and identify solutions.

The return-to-work meeting may be used to

- update the employee about any changes that have happened during his or her absence
- remind the employee that he or she has been missed and is valued by the organization
- discuss and deal with any fears or concerns the employee has about returning to work
- identify any special needs the employee may have returning to work

Return-to-work agreements

HR representatives and/or supervisors must also be clear about job performance expectations and what will happen if job performance is not satisfactory.

Relapse can be very serious in terms of safety, liability, workplace morale and customer image. There must be a balance between supporting a recovering employee and ensuring workplace safety. The consequences of a relapse must be spelled out very clearly. Even though it may never happen, it is important for HR and/or supervisors and employees to talk openly about the possibility and consequences of a relapse.

A return-to-work agreement is a formal, written record of the agreements made between the organization and the employee. It should specify

- clear performance expectations
- when and how performance will be reviewed
- consequences of poor performance
- consequences of a relapse (e.g., being under the influence of alcohol on the job, testing positive for drugs, gambling on company time)
- the plan for long-term support

Regular performance reviews offer the supervisor an opportunity to recognize, compliment and support employees who are succeeding.

Long-term support

There needs to be ongoing supervision and support once the employee is back on the job. Meeting with the employee on a regular basis to review job performance provides opportunity for the supervisor to recognize, compliment and support employees who are succeeding. It also provides an opportunity to address any job performance concerns early, before major problems develop.

The recovering employee should leave their treatment program with an aftercare plan. This plan includes steps the employee can take to reduce the risk of relapse. This plan may require ongoing counselling or attendance at self-help group meetings. Some flexibility with scheduled work hours may be necessary for a period of time after the employee returns to work.

Tips for HR and/or the Supervisor

- Set up a return-to-work meeting for returning employees.
- Provide returning employees with written job performance guidelines, including consequences if performance expectations are not met.
- Consider completing a return-to-work agreement.
- Ensure all employees are aware of sources of assistance and support.
- Adjust the employee's work schedule to accommodate time off to attend follow-up counselling and programming.
- Review performance regularly.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Compliment and reinforce the employee's success.

WHAT CO-WORKERS CAN DO

It's important to look at what is helpful and what is not when it comes to supporting your fellow workers. Sometimes co-workers think they are helping a person with a problem by covering up for them or ignoring the problem altogether. These actions don't help. In fact, they sometimes make the problem worse by allowing it to continue longer.

This is true even after a co-worker gets help for a problem. A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself "if one of my co-workers who didn't have a problem was doing this, would I ignore it or try to make excuses?" If the answer is "no," then you shouldn't do it for the recovering person either

It is also important not to get caught up in trying to make things easier for returning workers. For example,

doing their work or speaking to others on their behalf actually robs them of the opportunity to be responsible for their own success. People recovering from addiction problems learn they must take responsibility for their own actions. This means they need to carry their own workload and make their own decisions.

So, it's okay to ask a recovering colleague to join you at the weekend golf tournament, even if you know alcohol is being served. Be prepared for your co-worker to decline and, if they do, don't insist or pressure them into activities they are uncomfortable with.

Do support their decisions and continue to include them in activities.

Tips for Co-workers

- Participate in education sessions to learn about problems that can affect you or your fellow employees.
- Offer support and encouragement, but don't try to counsel.
- Remind troubled or recovering co-workers about the help available either at your workplace or in your community.
- Do not cover up or ignore your co-workers' poor job performance.
- Consider joining a peer support team.

For more information

AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission) offers a range of services to assist businesses in managing workplace substance use and gambling concerns. These services include

Information/Resources • Besides the *It's Our Business Information Series*, AADAC offers several resources for workplace leaders and employees.

The *It's Our Business* manual gives leaders in the workplace the information they need to build a healthy, well-functioning workplace team. This practical, well-organized binder offers clear information and insightful advice in an easy-to-follow format, based on a philosophy of fitness for work. Employers and managers are advised to remain focused on what is their business: the employee's ability to do his or her job.

To supplement the manual, AADAC offers three brochures to inform employees and enlist them as allies in creating a workplace that is free from the problems created by the abuse of alcohol, other drugs and gambling:

- *Is Drinking, Using Drugs or Gambling Affecting My Work?* helps employees to assess whether their work is being affected by their substance use or gambling and offers suggestions on finding further help.
- *Someone at Work Has a Problem* guides employees in intervening with a co-worker who may have an alcohol, other drug or gambling problem by outlining workplace indicators and tips for a successful intervention.
- *What You Need to Know About Fitness for Work* outlines the concept of fitness for work, and describes how substance use and gambling affect fitness for work, what an employee can do to be fit for work, and what one can do when others are not fit for work.

For more information on these and other resources from AADAC, call 310-0000/780-427-7319 (in Alberta) or 1-800-280-9616 or check the website at www.aadac.com

Employer Consultations • If you are concerned about an employee's substance use or gambling and would like to discuss strategies to intervene, contact the AADAC office nearest you.

Client Services • AADAC's network of services offers information sessions, assessment, individual and group counselling, and intensive treatment to any Albertan concerned about a substance use or gambling problem. Contact the nearest AADAC office for information.

Treatment Programs for Employees • The AADAC Business and Industry Clinic offers residential treatment programs specifically for the workplace. Located at the Northern Addictions Centre in Grande Prairie, the clinic offers a complete range of services to meet the needs of employees with substance abuse or gambling problems, as well as the needs of the referring party. Services include detoxification, a 30-day alcohol and drug program, a 50-day cocaine program, a family program and extensive follow-up programs. For more information, call 780-538-6316 or 1-800-419-1149.

Training for the Workplace • AADAC offers training to assist businesses in addressing substance abuse and gambling in the workplace. Training topics include understanding addiction, alcohol and drug policy development, and supervisory training on dealing with the troubled employee. Workshops can be custom designed and delivered at the worksite. For more information, contact your local AADAC area office.

AADAC
ALBERTA ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE COMMISSION

For more information, contact your local AADAC office, call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our website at www.aadac.com

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